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# INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Vol. VI, No. 2

Summer 1985



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# INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

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## Growing Up With Rockets



Photo album snapshots circa 1960 open Nancy Yasecko's personal diary/documentary film *GROWING UP WITH ROCKETS*.

even exactly where they were going, but as if in a prophetic waking dream we knew they held mystical significance. Nancy Yasecko's personal diary-documentary reminds us of those lingering, half-formed images, putting them into factual perspective without disturbing the magic that they will always hold.

Complete with an opening orgy of rocket blast-offs to fine original technopop music by Paul Ill and Mark Wood, her film celebrates the special community, Cape Canaveral/Kennedy, where these historic events were almost as mysterious to the engineers as they were to the general public of the day. To understand this unique, government-created scientific community, however, Yasecko focuses on her own displaced family, brought to Cocoa Beach in the early days of missile research (as one young woman observes, what began as a six month visit turned into a way of life). Through the sensitive narration (beautifully written by Nan Robinson), family anecdotes and reminiscences become imaginative reflections on this crucial era of change. These memories are transformed into little gems of wisdom and wit, with a sort of low-key Southern humor, when spoken in the lovely Ellen Gilchrist tones of Nancy Yasecko. The additional reverberation of word and image (whether it be archival material, family snapshots,

**ON THE COVER:** Independent filmmaker Nancy Yasecko from South Carolina explores her years growing up with rockets at Cape Canaveral/Kennedy. (Photo by George Fulton)

*I ask all the visitors to spend some time walking on the earth as I did.*

Carol Ward

**GROWING UP WITH ROCKETS.** Nancy Yasecko. 1984. 16mm. Color. Sound. 58m.

In the opening segment of *Growing Up With Rockets*, a soft, sweet Southern voice beckons us to follow it into a very personal, often impressionistic, vision of its childhood, its generation, and its America as together they come of age in the difficult era of rockets, missiles, space races, and men on the moon. The gentle voice, heard over family album snapshot images of a backyard "Spacarium" tourist attraction, is hard to resist, so, like Alice we wander through Nancy Yasecko's looking glass, ultimately to find ourselves reflected in her memories, observations, and research.

We all harbor images deep within our personal and national unconscious of those chilly pre-dawns when we were roused from peaceful slumbers to huddle starry-eyed before the huge cabinetted black and white television set while strange projectiles were directed at the seemingly impenetrable mysteries of the heavens. We didn't really know where these odd objects came from or



A still from home movies that are an integral part of the film *GROWING UP WITH ROCKETS* by Nancy Yasecko.

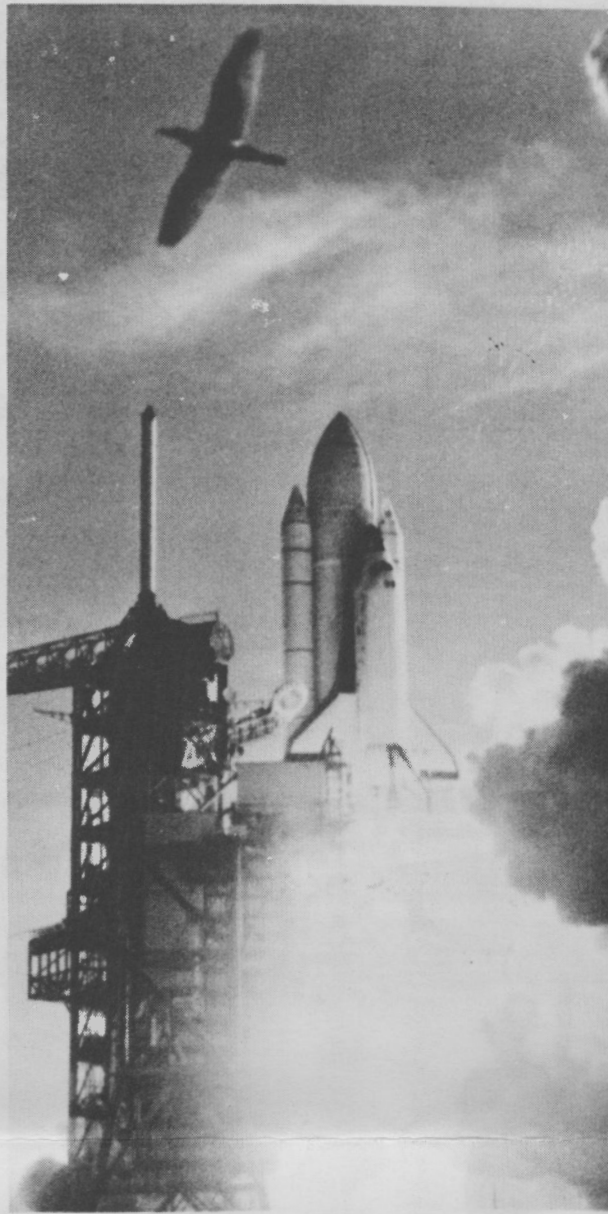


home movies, or original footage) creates the particular appeal of this hour-long documentary. A kind of childlike innocence and curiosity colors the narrative observations as certain strands of her past are disentangled and rewoven into near poetry.

These oral sketches bring to life an array of figures from her past. Yasecko's engineer father is an especially strong yet unseen presence in this film; his faith and total dedication to the future of space exploration and research is subtly revealed in a variety of tales and remarks. Yasecko remembers her father's reaction to Russia's temporary lead in the space race: "Russia's got Sputnik and we've got Kaputnik." When her mother cautiously tries to cheer him with the old adage of the tortoise and the hare, he growls "Hogwash" and goes outside to tune up his car. At the end of the film he is still making napkin calculations about future U.S. space stations, which will be operational in "ten years and twenty minutes."

I could give numerous examples of the poignant and provocative stories that fill the film (Yasecko, herself having worked briefly at the Cape), but my recounting cannot capture the narrative personality, the precise wording, and the amazing vocal delivery that harmonize for such an emotional affect on the viewer. It is hard to fathom that this intensely personal tone was accomplished through a collaboration—Yasecko's experiences are filtered through the literary imagination of Robinson in this fortuitous blending of talents. The visual images are easier to describe but are usually secondary in these moments of narrative reflection, a problem that the filmmakers probably did not intend to manufacture but one that was unavoidable considering the highly poetic quality of the narration. In fact, the juxtaposition of image and narration is rather obtrusive at points. For example, the commentative irony of shots of a country club golfer overdubbed with a story of a military man's stubborn anti-Red bias is overly obvious; here, the images actually detract from the excellent narration.

The personal anecdotes are interspersed throughout the film, but not all of the narration is of this type. Yasecko provides chronological historical continuity in her tracing of the thirty-year history of Cape Kennedy, the space program, and American culture. At times, this chronology



A still from *GROWING UP WITH ROCKETS* by Nancy Yasecko.

becomes somewhat mechanical, interrupting the fluidity of memory, but it is probably necessary to keep the complex events from causing confusion. She wisely lets a lot of these historical episodes speak with their own voices: President Kennedy's plea for a man on the moon; Neil Armstrong's "one small step for a man and one giant leap for mankind;" spacewalker Ed White's "boy oh boy oh boy; it's something;" Walter Cronkite's trusty reportage; Werner von Braun's somber lunar projections, etc. These official voices and their corresponding documentary images put into perspective the chaos of all of those early mornings in front of the hazy TV. In fact, Yasecko's archival NASA footage is of much better quality than I remember those scenes being on television as they were happening; it is as if we are now able to see those historic events with vividness and clarity.

A fascinating angle to her research is her collection of local documents that develop her portrait of the community—the celebration of engineers after successful launches, a church worship service in a bowling alley, Harris poll profiles of the typical Cape family, school parades and tributes to the astronauts (featuring baton "missile twisters"), behind-the-scenes glimpses of engineers at work, haunting images of crowds pointing their eyes and binoculars towards the sky as they wait (and wait) for lift-off.

To complement these official and semi-official voices, Yasecko incorporates contemporary footage of the survivors—young adults like herself who at their tenth year high school reunion ponder the significance of their life in the nation's space center as well as middle-aged adults who reflect on their past involvement with the space program. This footage is probably the weakest in the film. I wanted more of a sense of the real people behind the history, but the scarcity of these interviews (and the blandness of some of the ones selected) prevented this dimension of the portrait from communicating as powerfully as it might.

The Cape Kennedy that does emerge, however, is an insular, protected, undiversified, secretive society. As a created community, which evolved from people imported from all over the country for a particular purpose, the early Cape residents seemed more loyal to an ideal than to a place. They exhibit a strong faith in government and the idea of progress through technology. With the development of roots in these sandy beaches, the younger generation reflect a growing sense of tradition and belonging. Despite its WASP insularity (or perhaps because of it), the Cape becomes a barometer for America's atomic coming of age. Middle class security is shattered when after the Cuban missile crisis, "We were changed. Missiles meant something different."

The final phase of the Cape community, the film hints at its close, has already begun. The traditions of Yasecko's youth and young adulthood are already being forgotten (or passing into legend) as suggested when her young nephew refuses to believe the adult memories of the "flops," the numerous rockets that failed over the years of experimentation. The sense of mystery and wonder has subsided into the harsh realities of cutbacks and unemployment; the initial goals having been realized or altered, transforming our society into one that accepts and expects technology, the next generation will grow up with rockets to measure their lives but in a new and different way.

For further information, contact Vanguard Productions, P.O. Box 50241, Columbia, SC 29250.

*Growing Up With Rockets* has been awarded Best Southern Film at the 1985 Atlanta Film/Video Festival.

Carol Ward is Assistant Professor of English at Clemson University in South Carolina.



International press members watch a space shuttle launch in *GROWING UP WITH ROCKETS*.



# Production

## On-Line With Media Alliance

Robert Landau

*Recently, I had the opportunity to complete post-production work on an independently-produced documentary through the facilities of Reeves Teletape, a state-of-the-art commercial post-production house in New York City. This was made possible by the ON-LINE program, (which provides independents with access to commercial video houses) administered by the Media Alliance -- a New York State Media Arts Center with a number of services for independents.*

### THE INDEPENDENT VIDEO PRODUCER'S DILEMMA

Yes, you've got a million dollar baby in a five and ten cent store. But even at ten cents a dance, you still gotta pay the piper and your rich old Uncle Wiggly turns out to be stone deaf. Don't worry. All you need is approximately \$30,000 -- which is the cost of post-producing an hour-long television program at commercial rates, using accepted production methods.

So this is the independent video producer's dilemma. Unlike the filmmaker whose major costs come up front in film stock and lab fees, the videomaker is in the position of putting it in the can for relatively little money. Knowing he has a good show, he then faces the double-edged sword of financing the post-production with an eye towards distribution. All the while the words "Broadcast Quality" echo through his head like an ex cathedra lightning bolt hurled by the 50,000 watt God.

### THE WHITE KNIGHT VS. THE MATH MONSTER

Enter the white knight. He tells you that for a mere \$125/hour you can have it all. Yes, brothers and sisters, you can have it all--the squeeze zooms, the ADO's, Mirages, 360-degree rotational ice cream cone wipes shrunk down to postage stamp size revealing scene two. (Act two, Einstein dances on his hands wishing only he had thought of that.) Visions of invoices dance through your head. Where do I sign? Prick my finger, white knight, so that I may lay it on the dotted line.

Then there's the math. Logic rears its ugly head. Let's see. I've got 23 hours of tape to transfer to 1 inch. At \$125/hour, that's \$2875 plus tax, so let's call it an even \$3000. I've already rough cut my show on 3/4 inch which cost me \$1500 at my local neighborhood media access center, but now I'll be using time-code numbers so I need to recut it. Figure 1 1/2 weeks equals \$375. Also I need work tapes and 1 inch stock equalling \$2000. I write my EDL (edit decision list) and go to work ON-LINE. Figure I've got 400 edits to make at 8 edits/hour, so that's 50 hours. Let's see, that's \$6250 but then there are reel changes so let's figure \$7500 for ON-LINE. We're now looking at \$13,875. Not a bad price for an hour-long TV show. But you're an independent videomaker and only make \$12,000 per year. What to do?

Let's see. I heard you can transfer selected takes to 1 inch. That'll knock \$3820 off the cost of transfers and tape stock and now there'll be fewer reel changes so figure \$6000 ON-LINE.

Now we're looking at \$9820. Great. That means if I don't receive any grant money this year, I can still make my show but I gotta stop eating. You've

seen this guy. He's artsy pale and passes out at your party after one Chablis.

There has got to be a better way, White Knight. What's that, you say, the horse you rode in on...his name's Technologia Apropos. Can this be? Is it every American's inalienable right to make TV? Yes, but it helps to have a good line of talk. Then he rode off in a chromium dioxide cloud.

First thing you want to do is look around. Every independent producer worth his/her salt knows what and where they can get their hands on for free. What you need is a 3/4-inch editing bench with a good TBC (time base corrector) interfaced between the machines. Why? Because you are about to enter the forbidden city of second generation 3/4-inch on-line editing. Sure, they've told you that you can't do that. They've told you that your show will be noisy, that the edits will be unstable with ringing and k-factoring and that you'll never pass technical specifications. But that was before, before, before the Sony VO-5800 VCR, before the almighty BVU 820 and certainly before the advent of the \$10,000 TBC that actually works. So what you do is conform your show with all the straight cuts end to end and wherever there is an effect (dissolve, wipe or digital effect), you leave a five second tail, followed by a black slug, followed by a five second head and the B-roll portion of your next shot to be used as part of the effect. Then continue with your straight cuts until the next effect. Take all this, mix, and bump thoroughly to two 1 inch rolls marked A and B. Now make visually time-coded work dubs of your A and B reels and write an EDL referenced to your rough cut. After you have cut your show in this fashion, you're ready to contact the ON-LINE program in NYC.

At this point, let me interject that each individual's experience in this sort of program is going to be different depending on the needs of your show, the personalities of the production personnel involved and, of course, the availability of the almighty buck. But now that you're not going to be spending thousands of dollars on CMX time doing something that an off-line editing system can do just as well, you can spend your time and money increasing the production values of your show and all at the cost of less than 2 dB's of signal to noise and a tad of resolution. What're a few dB's between friends, or better yet, between producer and viewer.

So you've gotten on the blower and spoken to Robin White of the Media Alliance. She tells you that as long as you're non-profit, non-funded, and none too shy of the cash, just fill out the forms, pay the \$25 membership fee to the Media Alliance and that will allow you to be eligible for the ON-LINE program at Reeves Teletape, or one of the several other commercial houses in the program. She and the facilities manager, Bob McDowell, will review your rough cut and determine the needs of your project. This is probably the first time in your life that being an indigent independent actually worked in your favor.

Glory be. Now if you're anything like me, upon approval of your project, you won't be able to believe that you can now actually cut your show on-line using the latest, not to mention the trendiest effects going. Watch out Roone. Watch out Mr. and Mrs. MTV. Watch out yourself because it's all too easy to get caught up in seeing what these little babies can do. Lucky for you the

people at ON-LINE will let you preview all the digital effects you care to eat before you actually start paying for the time. If this doesn't satisfy your craving for KA KA, go ahead and use them, but remember when people are seeing the effect rather than your cause, communication has stopped. Shakespeare did not use one single digital effect yet his shows are still paying the bills. The people at ON-LINE will let you have it either way because that's the kind of folks they are. No strings. It's all out in the open, just trying to help, don't look a gift horse in the mouth. But getting too close to the other end of the horse can be a problem as well.

### THE CREATIVE OBSESSION

In other words, be prepared, keep tabs on all the time you've spent in the studio. It is advisable to make up a budget projecting how much time you can afford to spend creating each special effect you want. It's all too easy being the perfectionist that you are, to spend endless hours moving that shot just a few more frames so you can almost see the glow of the cigar light as fat Willy's close-up fades into the master shot of the buffet table. There's art and then there's obsession. It's your job to balance them all out and come up with a finished product. It's most important to remember the foregoing when it comes to your standard wipes, dissolves and keys. Make as many of the creative decisions as possible outside the CMX studio where someone is not pulling \$125 out of your pocket every 60 minutes.

The solution to this is simple, but might require a little leg work on your part during the off-line stages. But, hey, work is your middle name. You're an independent producer, courageous, cunning, resourceful and square to the pack. Now just get yourself a cheap switcher, your work dubs, a camera or two, and wheel them up to a couple of monitors. Using the edit controller, dummy roll, in synch, a time-coded work dub on each monitor, create your effects between the cameras through the switcher all the while recording the effects on a third VTR which is rolling wild. Take the effects that you like and slug them into your rough cut. Use this information to write the effects into your EDL. It's here that you can futz around very cheaply all you like with the timing of the effects and figure out the exact durations and in's and out's of your effects. Also if you have access to a character generator or key camera, you can add your titles, keys and credits and write the appropriate numbers onto your edit decision list. All this will save you a small fortune when you're on-line.

OK, so now you're there. You're in New York working in the studio. Everything's going great. The show's looking just like you imagined it. You're even getting along great with the tech people. (They, after all, get tired of commercial TV day after day and like to work on something different) when all of a sudden your master VTR develops palsy. Your once beautiful show now looks like Campbell's Cream of Confetti Soup. Remember even though you're working at reduced rates, you are still the client. Log the downtime in your notes and make sure that at the end of the session you are not charged for it. Even downtime at 75% reduced rates is no bargain. The people at Reeves will respect you for it. This is New York. Raise hell.



Boy. Whoo, you made it. After 32 hours in the studio, it's done. This is us having a video show, and you still like it. The people at Reeves are happy, the Media Alliance is happy, your partners in crime are happy. Now it's time to pay the bill. "Aye, me laddie, we've played the tune. Now it's your turn to pay." Well, you better ante up. Just about every post-production house you deal with is going to ask for cash at the door, at least the first few times you deal with them. After that determines whether you will receive credit or not. But listen, you're getting away for under \$5000 for close to a \$30,000 job. This is a great deal.

One or two things remain to be said about the ON-LINE program. First, Reeves is a turn-key post-production facility. They will help you in any type of production predicament you might be in, from film to tape transfers to audio sweetening to ultimatte effects to color correction. They have it all and are willing to make it available to independents. This is good, but as an independent on a budget you will find it necessary to show restraint. If your video sweet tooth rules your brain, you could wind up with a very bad stomach ache. Nuff said. Second, a large part of this equation is still left up to the independent. That is, if they want to avail themselves of the appropriate technology during the appropriate steps of production. The problem is basically this: to cut A-B reels off-line on 3/4-inch video, you really have to scrounge for a good system—one with a good digital TBC, drop out compensation (a must), possibly some image enhancement, a little noise reduction, the whole schmere. Now a quick fella or gal could find such a system in a small coastal educational T.V. station but that's another story. Needless to say, like love, good 3/4-inch editing is where you find it.

It seems to me at least that if a truly state of the art 3/4-inch to 3/4-inch editing system was available at reduced rates through the ON-LINE program or through a media access center, they would be complementing the services already offered and performing an even greater service to the independent community. But, hey, like I said we're getting a great deal here thanks to ON-LINE and



Available to independent regional video artists is the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center's 3/4" video editing studio with Sony 5850 VCR System, JVC KM 200 switcher, CVS 504 TBC, Hitachi waveform monitor and Tascam audio equipment. Rental is \$60/day. For information, call 803/758-7942. (Photo by David Sloss)

other programs like it. It's now feasible to be truly independent and produce quality products at popular prices. Can't beat it with a stick, not even a big one. It's a good deal and a good deal more. Thanks Media Alliance, thanks Robin, thanks Bob, thanks White Knight.

The Media Alliance has developed the ON-LINE program to make state-of-the-art post-production facilities available at reduced rates to artist/producers with non-commercial projects. Reduced rates will fall between 50% - 90% off

rate card.

For more information, contact Robin White at Media Alliance, c/o WNET/356 W. 58th St./New York, NY 10019/(212) 560-2919.

Robert Landau is an independent videomaker in Columbia, SC who is currently working on a musical oral history called ALL ALONG FROM RHODO TO HANGING DOG.

## The Video Confederacy Features Award-Winners

The Video Confederacy is a sizzling potpourri of innovative videos created by award-winning media artists of the New South. Collectively, the artists' have been represented in several national film and video festivals including Ithaca, Atlanta, Sinking Creek, New Orleans and FilmSouth. Their works have been broadcast nationally and regionally on both cable and broadcast television. Selected works have been shown in national exhibitions.

### Robert Walker (Blacksburg, VA)

City One is a fast-paced, scenic tour of the Golden Gate city. The viewer is given a tour of the soul of the city to a hard-driving soundtrack. Beso: Ma Que Tu Plesas abstracts images into their basic colors before reforming them into images and starting this cycle over again. Rapid Transit distorts the space-time continuum as we take a ride from the city into the country. Automatic Grind is a visual jazz piece. The basic movement is improvised by the artist, who like a jazz musician, creates a new thematic motion. To Walt Whitman is a heartfelt exploration of the transformation of a rural Southern town into a resort community.

### Marty Vermillion (Mt. Pleasant, SC)

Go For It is a rollicking video dance using

special effects to accentuate the dancer's motions as she bops around Charleston, SC to a heavy metal soundtrack. Family Reunion captures the flavor of a typical extended Southern family as they join together in a 50-year-old tradition. Happy Feet allows the interaction of the electronics of the medium and the movements of the dancer to create a toe-tapping electronic boogaloo.

### Jim Edwards (Columbia, SC)

Spots is an insightful collection of shorts. Reflections from the artist require the audience to digest societal and artistic observations.

### Joni Varner (High Point, NC)

Now I See Thy Looks Were Feigned is a modern day interpretation of Thomas Ford's 16th century choral piece. Set against the Elizabethan chorus, the tape takes a 20th century romance and intertwines the two works. Myriad uses electronics to create an abstract expressionistic video that visually describes the upbeat synthesizer music it is scored to. One offers the viewer a modern day pas-de-deux between the motions of the human body and the automobile.

### Michael Ferguson (Spartanburg, SC)

Angst! includes interpretations of works by Thomas Hardy and views of today's society through the tabloid press. Phase One uses a singular electronic effect allowing the dancer to attune her stroboscopic motions to traditional Appalachian hammer dulcimer music. Poppycock uses a rock and roll tune as a springboard for electronic images to bump and grind across the screen.

### Robin Reidy and Bill Thompson (Atlanta, GA)

Declaration of Independents is an insightful documentary on today's independent film/video makers. Artists reflect on their work and their lot, with interviews intercut with dramatic highlights from their works. Artists interviewed include Chip Lord, John Sanborn, Gayla Jamison, Kathleen Dowdey, and Mark Rappaport.

The Video Confederacy is available as a one-hour and a two-hour show. For more information, contact Michael Ferguson, 123 Linville Drive, Moore, SC, (803) 574-6125.

The program was made possible through a grant from the South Carolina Arts Commission and the Media Arts Center.



# Reviews

## Yeah You Rite

Andrew Horton

**YEAH YOU RITE!** Louis Alvarez & Andy Kolker. 1985. ¾" video. Color. Sound. 29 min.

Opening shot: Times Square, New York. A microphone reaches out to a series of people on the street to ask them a question. "If someone said they would give you a muffalata for lagniappe what would they mean?" Guesses pour in: "A muffalata is a muffin," "It's a muffler," "How am I supposed to know?" and finally, a young man laughs and says, "They don't speak English down there!" Cut to New Orleans to the beat of a spicy piano rag by Mac Rebennack (Dr. John), and *Yeah you Rite!*, a half hour video documentary on dialects in the Crescent City made by Louis Alvarez and Andy Kolker, is under way.

The film quickly establishes that EVERYBODY knows what a muffalata (a special kind of Italian submarine sandwich packed with everything) and lagniappe (Cajun French for "a little extra": i.e., something for nothing) mean in New Orleans. But this ambitious and well-constructed project goes on to uncover much more. By tape's end, Alvarez and Kolker have taken the viewer through the streets, shops, homes, and festivities of the city ranging from Uptown sophisticates to Ninth Ward black teenage girls, from downtown aristocratic businessmen to Rastafarian street vendors, and from ritual New Orleans' activities such as purchasing a "king cake" (sweetbread eaten at parties between Twelfth Night and Mardi Gras) to a simple street festival in a local neighborhood.

New Orleans has often been the subject and object of the documentary filmmaker's lens. Les

Blank's *Always for Pleasure*, for instance, is a fiesty testament to the music, food and spirit of festivity in "The City That Care Forgot" as it is often called. But Alvarez and Kolker have turned their attention to an area seldom approached by documentary and little researched in New Orleans. "I think of our tape as a celebration of the diversity of the city," says Alvarez who, like his partner Andy Kolker, first came to New Orleans a decade ago. What they were after was the incredible mixture of dialects that make up the city's speech. Financed in large part by a grant from the Louisiana Committee for the Humanities, this project allowed the video duo to shoot roughly thirty five hours of interviews around the city, commentary by experts in linguistics, anthropology and sociology, and to tackle the formidable task of editing their material down to a brisk half-hour format.

"We were not so much interested in what people say," explains Alvarez, "as much as how people here talk!" Easy enough to say, but difficult to accomplish. How does one make speech cinematic? What direction should be taken in organizing so much raw data? If the vigorously appreciative audience of over 400 at the New Orleans premiere in February, 1985 in a French Quarter theater is a fair indication, they have hit upon a happy formula.

It's the people of New Orleans that hold our attention. A study of dialect is the intellectual concept behind the film but what we see and experience is the vibrant variety of folk, black, white, rich, poor, creole and hispanic, who make this city on the Mississippi not a melting pot but a red hot gumbo of culture, spirit, and language. Alvarez and Kolker use the "cross cut" style to

good advantage to contrast one interviewee with the next, and then, at times, to double back on some of our favorites. Two examples stand out. One is a young black girl having her hair curled in a beauty parlor who speaks with gusto about the fact that people in New Orleans "just KNOW" when someone is or isn't speaking a city dialect. Later after we have heard several Uptown white subjects, we again cut back to the beauty parlor where the girl jokes with her friends as she imitates the way the "preppie" white chicks speak on the Tulane University campus. She ends with a joke about these kind of Uptown folk are just concerned with "how much money has YOUR daddy got?" In a city in which there is an often unacknowledged bias against those with a "dialect" (the whites Uptown, of course, as the film makes clear, often are not aware that they too speak a dialect!), *Yeah you Rite!* is subtly weighed in favor of the zesty spirit and language of the less privileged as such cross-cutting suggests. For the girl with curlers is not only given "the last word" on the wealthy whites, but her comment about money is echoed several times by others thus suggesting (but not preaching) the economic basis behind dialect that determines who can live in what neighborhood.

The second example is a black street vendor on Canal St. in his late thirties. He expresses a more direct anger at how language can be used by the ruling class to classify "inferiors." "Who determines if I speak proper? You tell me that! I want to know!" he says. Alvarez and Kolker double back to him in the closing moments as he gives what could be a summation statement; "People make the world go 'round." The color of one's skin or the sound of a dialect don't determine the quality of a person's heart, as this unidentified street citizen remarks.

The overall tone, however, is one of celebration and good humor. These video artists manage to educate as they entertain. To accomplish this, numerous imaginative techniques are used including one sequence in which we see the exteriors of a black bar, an Uptown mansion, and an "average" New Orleans shotgun home (a long, narrow, one-story wooden house). As the camera tracks forward in each case, we hear those inside speaking in their own way, but we never see them. In such a way we come to concentrate more clearly on the relationship between environment and language without the need for an obtrusive voice-over narrator (a local D.J. does some voice-over, but only where it is necessary). Alvarez and Kolker wanted to reach both a hometown audience and a national one. At the premiere, New Orleanians not only clapped, cheered, laughed (one fellow who appears briefly in the film shouted out in glee "That's ME up there! That's ME!!!") but many I talked to felt the film helped them understand with new insight the relationship of dialect to local culture. With the slight modifications they plan to make for a general release, one feels this informal yet intelligent video documentary will find a nationally appreciative following.

The project is only one part of a long-term interest and commitment Alvarez and Kolker have made to the study of American dialects. Alvarez first came to New Orleans to live in 1975 after graduating from the University of Wisconsin. Once in town he met Andy Kolker who had come South from Massachusetts where he graduated from Clark College. Together the two began making a



Video producers Louis Alvarez and Andy Kolker on location in the neighborhoods of New Orleans. (Photo by Josephine Sacabo.)



series of video documentaries on poverty in New Orleans through NOVAC, the New Orleans Video Access Center. These included *Changing The Channel* (1977, 30m.), *Talking Crime* (1979, 30m.), and *The Clarks* (1979, 30m.). And then after ten months of shooting and editing, they produced a feature documentary on Judge Leander Perez's infamous political kingdom in neighboring Plaquemines Parish entitled *The Ends of the Earth* (1982, 82m. and 58m. versions). Their impressive teamwork earned them a Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival in New York and numerous television screenings. As "outsiders" who have nevertheless lived in the area long enough to understand the subtler shadings of culture in Louisiana, Alvarez and Kolker handled the complex political mosaic of the Perez legend with adroit skill. They use old newsreels and TV footage as well as interviews to get at the man behind the myth of a Huey Long-styled local monarch. But even more important is the diversity of Plaquemines Parish which they detail, shooting the mixture of Cajun, Croatian, Iselenos (Canary

Island Spanish), black and Anglo-Saxon cultures that meet in the Delta bayous. In 1983, they returned to the Parish to focus on the Iselenos sub-culture in a 22-minute video entitled *Mosquitoes and High Water*.

The way people talk in New Orleans first found its way onto video in their *Lexicon*, a five-minute piece made in 1980. This brief glimpse at such terms as "to make groceries" (to go shopping) and "banquette" (sidewalk) has been so popular in the city that it is rerun constantly on a local Channel between feature shows. *Yeah you Rite!* was the logical extension of such a concept. And there is much more to follow. They have applied for and been awarded a sizable NEH grant to continue their dialect studies across the country in a feature video entitled *American Tongues*. Their preliminary research in 1983 took them to North Carolina, New York, Philadelphia and Boston, but they plan to include a number of other American locations in their pursuit of language and culture.

Flaherty used to say, "One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit." Alvarez and Kolker

would perhaps quibble with the concept of "distort." But in *Yeah you Rite!* they have used a variety of cinematic techniques, their years of experience living in the area, and infinite patience in editing down hours of tape, to capture the "true spirit" of the diversity of New Orleans speech. As one enthusiastic viewer commented, "I hope they make a sequel called *Where Y' At?*" Which is New Orleanian for "How you doin'?"

For information, contact Center for New American Media, 524 Broadway, 2nd floor, New York, NY 10012, (212) 925-5665.

Andrew Horton is an associate professor of film and literature at the University of New Orleans. His latest book is *THE FILMS OF GEORGE ROY HILL* (Columbia U. Press, 1984) and his latest film (co-screenplay) is the award winning *SOMETHING IN BETWEEN* (Yugoslavia, 1983, directed by Srdjan Karanovic).

# Comments

## Works In Progress

Paty Bustamante

### Gayla Jamison -- Atlanta, GA

Gayla is in post-production of the *Ybor City Film Project*, the working title for an hour-long documentary about an immigrant community in Tampa, that in 1986 will be one hundred years old. "Ybor City is mostly composed of Cubans, Sicilians and Spaniards. It is a community unique to the South because usually the Latin population in this area is the result of the post-Castro immigration. This significantly pre-dates that." Ybor City was built around the cigar industry, which was moved from the Key West area, by a Cuban cigar manufacturer. It became a self-contained and self-sufficient community that strove to maintain its language, heritage and cultural identity. Out of the needs of an immigrant community and of working people, mutual benefit societies were created. These societies were organized along national lines: the Cubans had the "Circulo Cubano," Sicilians the "Union Italiana" and the Spanish had the "Centro Espanol" and "Centro Asturiano." The different societies mainly provided health benefits, and for a minimal fee their members had the best medical attention available. During World War II, a slow disintegration of the community began to occur. The younger men went off to war and returned with a different view of the world. The cigar industry was declining and there was no reason to live near the factory. The post World War II generation was becoming upwardly mobile with a need to conform and become part of main-stream America. Ultimately, people started moving out of the community; hence, the neighborhoods and buildings became dilapidated. In the late 50's and early 60's, urban renewal sealed the fate of Ybor City by razing a good portion of the houses, stores and other structures. The community's customs and existence were drastically changed. Commerce and trade depended on the neighborhood people patronizing their stores, but without the patrons, stores had to close down or open for only a few hours during the day. People no longer promenaded up and down the main streets and the downtown area became deserted.

Ybor City had turned into an anonymous community with the potential to attract crime. "Right now Ybor City is a community in transition. The artists have moved in and they have helped renovate buildings and have made the neighborhoods safe again. People want to come into the community once more, but at the same time, real estate developers are buying, renovating, and leasing buildings for extremely high prices." The mutual benefit societies still exist, but their main function is a social one. The cigar workers now belong to a union and many people work in places where health benefits are provided. With the loss of cultural identity, a great number of the people did not continue their membership in the societies. The "Circulo Cubano" is almost bankrupt and it is mainly leased out for parties and theater groups. Yet, the "Centro Asturiano" holds a dance every other Saturday that is usually attended by around 200 people. "Some people are trying to find new uses for the societies' buildings. They are of a substantial and beautiful architecture that should be preserved as part of history. But, it is sad that the need for the clubs has really passed and any attempt to keep them going is more for nostalgia." Ybor City is described through her century by her own people, young and old. "I wanted to avoid a narrator and I wanted people of the community to tell their own story which means that sometimes they contradict each other and sometimes they don't tell things in the most articulate way. But more important is the essence of what they are saying and what they are feeling than getting statistics correct. I want to show the way somebody's eyes glisten when they tell a story or anecdote." *Ybor City Film Project* is about a community and, in a broader sense, is a film about communities. What is it that brings people together and keeps them bound together? What happens to the children and grandchildren of immigrants when they become assimilated into the American culture and lose their language and heritage? "The film doesn't offer any answers or solutions. I just hope people will think of their own communities and whether they feel a bond to their neighbors and, if they don't, is there something missing?"

Funding for *Ybor City Film Project* was

provided by the Florida Endowment for the Humanities, the Florida Bureau for Historical Preservation, The United States Catholic Conference and a South Carolina Arts Commission Equipment Grant. For further information contact Gayla Jamison, Lightfoot Films Inc. 441 Ridgewood Drive N.E., Atlanta, GA., 30307.

### Ashley Bates -- Columbia, SC

Ashley is in the middle of production of her Master's Thesis Project, an untitled five minute, 16mm animation. "I still have some decisions to make about the structure and the meaning of this film. However, I think the film has evolved from a description of a lesson I learned to an impression of my state of being during the time I truly learned the lesson." This film is a self-portrait of self-discovery and examination. When Ashley began working on this project, she set out to portray feelings and attitudes that evolve from creating art, but as she became more involved in the animation she realized that she was re-learning experiences rather than describing them. Even though the artist had learned a lesson, with each new creation came a new understanding or a different level of understanding. The artist is looking for a "true mirror" and through art the artist finds that mirror and a reflection of herself. Visually, Ashley has used pastels and a flat rough "primitive" style of drawing. The images depict light, sources of light, and reflections. There is an absolute lack of shadows. The use of light is an allegory of the process of self-discovery. "Art is a distillation of the original life energy; it is a process of illumination. You can't look at the sun directly, but you can look into a reflection of yourself. Art becomes a tool for seeing one's self." The accompanying soundtrack will not be mixed until after the film is completed, and the verbal ending will probably differ from the visual ending. The sound effects will enhance and broaden the levels touched by the visual aspects, but at the same time they will allow the filmmaker to provide simultaneous positive and negative outcomes at the conclusion of the film. For further



information, contact Ashley Bates, 19 Broadway Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

### Perry Carrison -- Rembert, SC

Perry Carrison and Billy Shepard have produced a series of live performances called *Black Music for White People*. The concerts featured all the genres of black music available in South Carolina and they were held at Millvale -- Perry's old family house built around 1800 and located near Rembert, S.C. Perry and Billy feel that racial relations in the state are much improved, but that most whites still do not know where to find many of the wonderful things about black culture. Consequently, the idea grew to have a musical series. "We went out and held auditions. We've been to people's houses, churches and schools. We have canvassed the state and put the word out for a specific type of performance and people have contacted us." There are five to six different acts in each separate concert and they have included a range from gospel choirs to blues singers. In October of last year, Perry and Billy held a small showcase of the talent they had scouted and invited several friends to involve them in the series. Each friend agreed to sell ten tickets, and in that manner, people in the community heard about *Black Music for White People*. Each performance sold out. "The success of the series is that they have been equally well-attended by blacks and whites. That was the important ingredient: that blacks and whites shared something fun together. The power in doing that is hard to measure." Billy is thinking of producing a series of blues presentations in Camden, S.C., and he plans to use the local population of performers and benefit a charitable cause. Perry is involved in establishing Millvale as an artists' and writers' retreat. "A plantation in South Carolina has lost its purpose, and I'd like a viable use for Millvale. This is a beautiful place and a perfect location for artists, writers, dancers and thinkers to come and have a concentrated time on their work. We are putting a selection committee together to choose people nation-wide to come and stay here." In addition, he is co-producing a video tape from material from the concerts, with South Carolina filmmaker David Boatwright. For more information contact Perry Carrison at Millvale in Rembert, SC 29128.

### Charles Lyman -- Tampa, FL

Charles has recently finished shooting the film series *Fantasy of Florida: Dreams Expressed in Architecture*. The series consists of five 30 minute pieces that highlight specific time periods of Florida's architectural history. The chronology starts from the early conquistadores to the visionary architects of the twentieth century. "The general premise of the show is that Florida has always attracted dreamers, people with extravagant ideas inspired in the exotic atmosphere and semi-tropical condition. These people have come to Florida and created environments and left monuments behind. We are looking at those structures and the people who use them today." The first program deals with the time of the early Spanish explorers through the late 1880's. Florida was the focus of special dreams. The first conquistadores came with the hope of discovering



The Brothers of Harmony from Lugoff, South Carolina perform as part of the live musical series, *BLACK MUSIC FOR WHITE PEOPLE*, presented by Perry Carrison and Billy Shepard.

gold, health and youth, but many of those ambitions turned out to be without any foundation. The first 200 years of Spanish occupation in Florida were bleak and homesteading was a battle against nature. The conquistadores were disappointed in their quest, but left buildings behind that symbolized those early dreams. As Florida came under the influence of other nations, including England, different dreams developed. There were dreams of plantations, remote and beautiful, in the wilderness of the peninsula. After the Civil War, a vacationing movement began to develop in the state. Riverboat traffic down the St. John's River brought vacationers from colder climates who came to rediscover health. Florida was being recommended as a health resort. Victorian Gingerbread and Steamboat architecture dotted the land and became the focus of people's hopes and imagination. In the second program, the development of the railroads is depicted, and the race between two dreamers trying to outdo each other is traced. Henry Plant and Henry Flagler, two northern entrepreneurs, built the railroads and essentially opened the east and west coast of Florida. Everytime the railroads reached a remote town, a palatial hotel was built. The resorts excited the imagination of people and attracted them to come and stay. "This was their particular place where they could have a complete retreat, a renewal, and the freedom to fantasize." This period reaches the late 1910's. The next piece portrays the Great Florida Boom Times of the 1920's. Land became a precious commodity and developers and speculators scattered about making the best of it. Coral Gables was developed by George Merrick; Addison Mizner introduced a bogus Spanish architectural style into Palm Beach, and D.P. Davies, a Tampa area developer, created Davis Islands by digging up the bottom of the sea. There was a passion for city building and

construction of communities with all the requirements for pleasurable, easy living. The architecture was fanciful with exotic buildings, crazy palaces, and Moorish extravaganzas with towers and minarets. The dream ended with the financial crash of the late 20's. The fourth film deals with the advent of the automobile. Cars allowed an entire new generation of people to visit Florida for the first time. With them came the flappers and the Art Deco developers and entrepreneurs. "There is a whole collection of buildings, starting with the Art Deco districts of Miami all the way to the roadside architecture. The buildings were designed to pull a person off the road and expose them to a piece of art and sell them something at the same time." The final program deals specifically with the eccentrics and the visionary architects. "People who building-wise were completely outside the usual building patterns, have come up with entirely different structures, such as the Amsterdam Palace in Miami, or the 'herwede' backyard sculptures." Also included in the last show is the work of Frank Lloyd Wright at Florida Southern College, and the work of Florida architect, William Morgan, who designed the Florida State Museum in Gainesville. *Fantasy of Florida* will be broadcast in mid-April by the Florida PBS network. The series will be aired weekly on Thursday nights. This film is a co-production of Atlantic Productions and WEDU Television; the Executive Producer is Linda Bassett. Funding was provided by the Graham Foundation in Chicago, local PBS sources, and private donations. For more information, contact Charles Lyman at WEDU Television, 1300 North Blvd., Tampa, FL. 33607.

Paty Bustamante is an independent animator in Columbia, South Carolina.

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